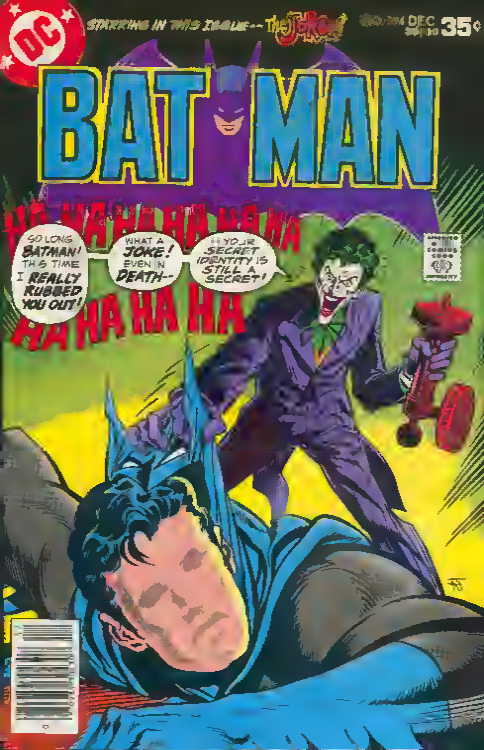
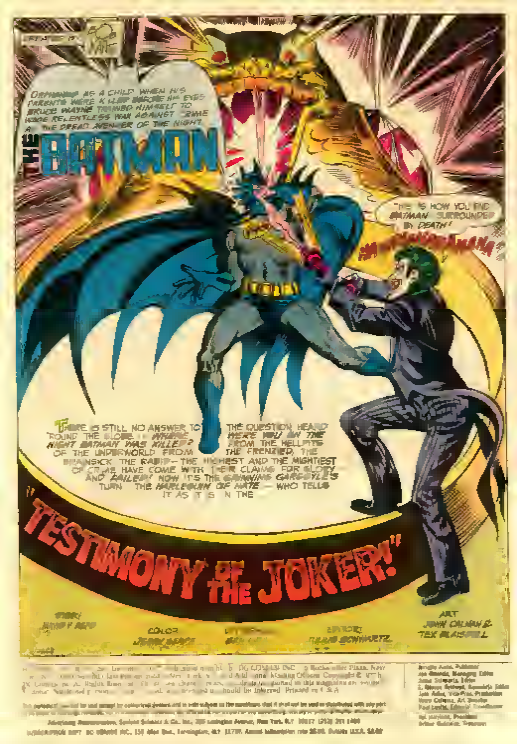
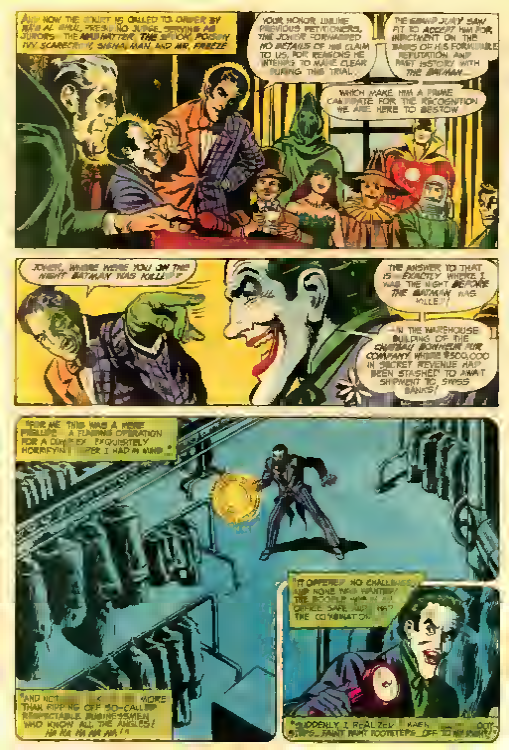
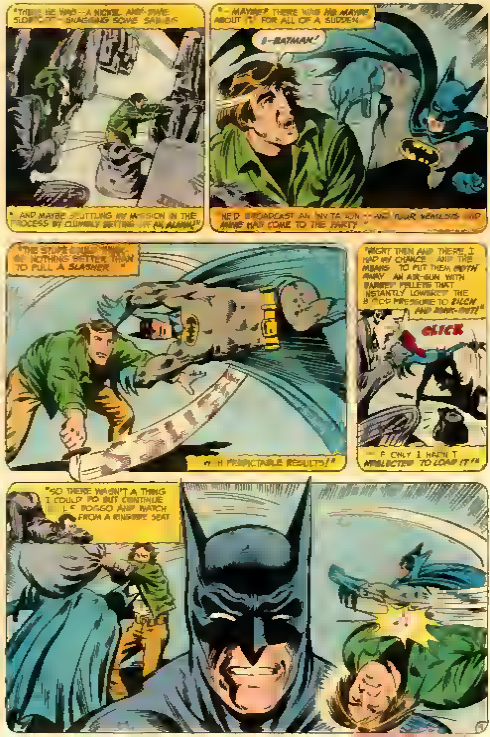
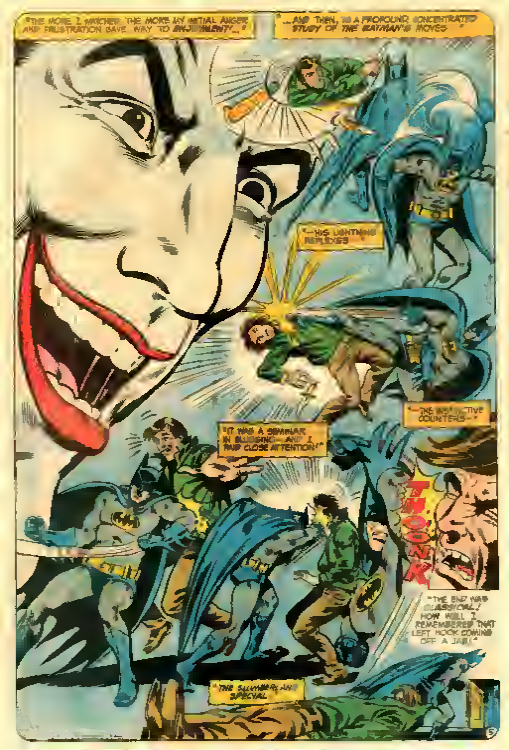

DC
STARRING IN THIS ISSUE-- The Joker!
No. 294 DEC
35¢
BATMAN
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
SO LONG BATMAN! THIS TIME I REALLY RUBBED YOU OUT!
WHAT A JOKE! EVEN IN DEATH--
--YOUR SECRET IDENTITY IS STILL A SECRET!
HA HA HA HA HA
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY


THE BATMAN
DEFENDER OF THE NIGHT
DEFENDING AS A CHILD WHEN HIS PARENTS WERE KILLED BEFORE HIS EYES, BRUCE WAYNE TOUNED HIMSELF TO RELENTLESS WAR AGAINST CRIME UNDER THE DEFIED MEMBER OF THE NIGHT!
THIS IS HOW YOU END BATMAN — SURROUNDED BY DEATH!
HA-HA-HA-HA-HA
THERE IS STILL NO ANSWER TO THE QUESTION HEARD ROUND THE WORLD: WHO IS NIGHT BATMAN, THE KILLER OF THE UNDERWORLD FROM WHERE DID YOU COME FROM THE HELLPITS OF THE FRONTIER, THE BRAINSICK THE RICH, THE HIGHEST AND THE MEANTEST OF LAWS HAVE COME WITH THEIR CLAIMS FOR GLORY AND JAILBAIT NOW IT'S THE GRINNING GARGOYLES TURN THE HARLEQUIN OF HATE — WHO TELLS IT AS IT IS IN THE
"TESTIMONY OF THE JOKER!"
STORY: BOBBY REED
COLOR: JERRY BARRY
ART: JOHN CALNAN & TEX BLASDELL
EDITOR: FRANK SCHWARTZ

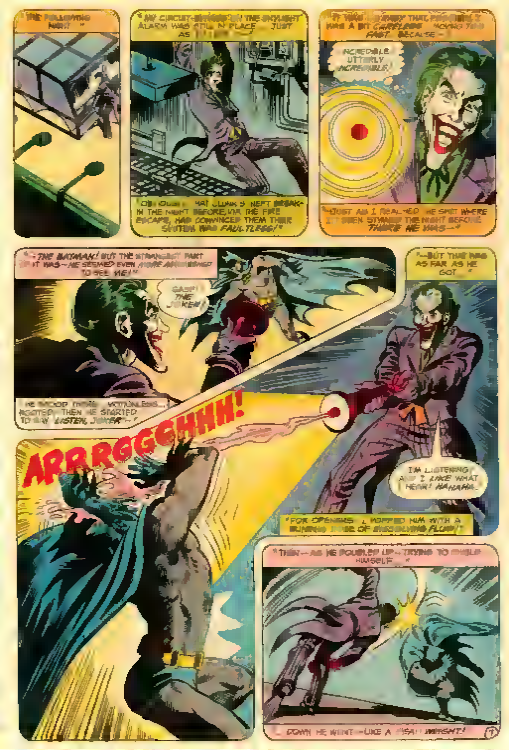

WE ARE PRESENT AT SESSION FOUR AS THE HIGH TRIBUNAL OF CRIME RESUMES ITS EXTRAORDINARY SERIES OF TRIALS TO ESTABLISH THE IDENTITY OF THE BATMAN'S KILLER.
WIDELY HERALDED THROUGHOUT THE UNDERWORLD, THEIR PROMISE OF SENSATIONAL DISCLOSURES HAS BEEN MORE THAN FULFILLED!
HERE IN THE REMOTE GUARDED CONFINES OF A COUNTRY ESTATE, THE RANKING PEERS OF OUTLAWRY AVIDLY DISCUSS THE PROSPECTS OF THE NEXT CLAIMANT--
--THE JOKER! PERENNIAL FUGITIVE FROM THE LOONY BIN -- THE MANIACAL MAESTRO OF MIRTH AND MAYHEM!
YOU SEEM OVERLY CONFIDENT, JOKER! AREN'T YOU WORRIED BY WHAT HAPPENED HERE TO THE CATWOMAN, LUTHOR, THE RIDDLER*?
ME WORRIED, CAVALIER? IT IS TO LAUGH! HA HA HA HA!
*THREE PREVIOUS ISSUES OF BATMAN! --JULIE
BUT TONIGHT, THE CLOWN PRINCE OF CRIME IS UP AGAINST THE DREAD AND DAZZLING TWO-FACE -- HARVEY DENT, TURNCOAT D.A. -- WHOSE VENOMOUS DISPLAY OF FORENSIC VIRTUOSITY HAS EARNED HIM THE WHISPERED SOBRIQUET OF CHAMP MOUTHPIECE!
HAVE ANY CLUES TO WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN, TWO-FACE?
NOT IN THIS CASE, CLUEMASTER! YOU'LL SEE WHY IN A FEW MINUTES!
2

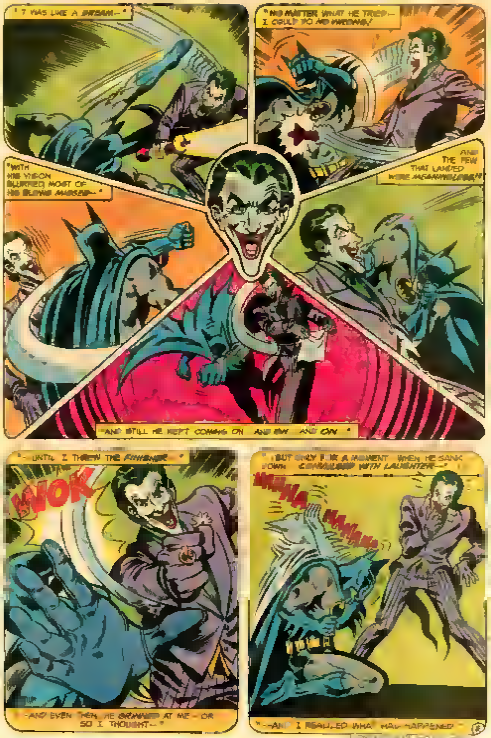

AND NOW THE COURT IS CALLED TO ORDER BY RA'S AL GHUL, PRESIDING JUDGE. SERVING AS JURORS: THE MAD HATTER, THE SPOOK, POISON IVY, SCARECROW, SIGNALMAN AND MR. FREEZE
YOUR HONOR, UNLIKE PREVIOUS PETITIONERS, THE JOKER FORWARDED NO DETAILS OF HIS CLAIM TO US, FOR REASONS HE INTENDS TO MAKE CLEAR DURING THIS TRIAL...
THE GRAND JURY SAW FIT TO ACCEPT HIM FOR INDICTMENT ON THE BASIS OF HIS FORMIDABLE REPUTATION AND PAST HISTORY WITH THE BATMAN...
WHICH MAKE HIM A PRIME CANDIDATE FOR THE RECOGNITION WE ARE HERE TO BESTOW
JOKER, WHERE WERE YOU ON THE NIGHT BATMAN WAS KILLED?
THE ANSWER TO THAT IS -- EXACTLY WHERE I WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE THE BATMAN WAS KILLED!
IN THE WAREHOUSE BUILDING OF THE CHATEAU BONHEUR FUR COMPANY, WHERE $500,000 IN SECRET REVENUE HAD BEEN STASHED TO AWAIT SHIPMENT TO SWISS BANKS!
"FOR ME, THIS WAS A MERE PRELUDE... A FUNDING OPERATION FOR A COMPLEX, EXQUISITELY HORRIFYING [illegible] I HAD IN MIND..."
"AND NOT [illegible] MORE THAN RIPPING OFF SO-CALLED RESPECTABLE BUSINESSMEN WHO KNOW ALL THE ANGLES! HA HA HA HA HA!"
"IT OFFERED NO CHALLENGE, AND NONE WAS WANTED! THE BOODLE WAS IN AN OFFICE SAFE AND I HAD THE COMBINATION.
"SUDDENLY, I REALIZED [illegible] FOOTSTEPS... FAINT [illegible] FOOTSTEPS... OFF TO MY RIGHT!"

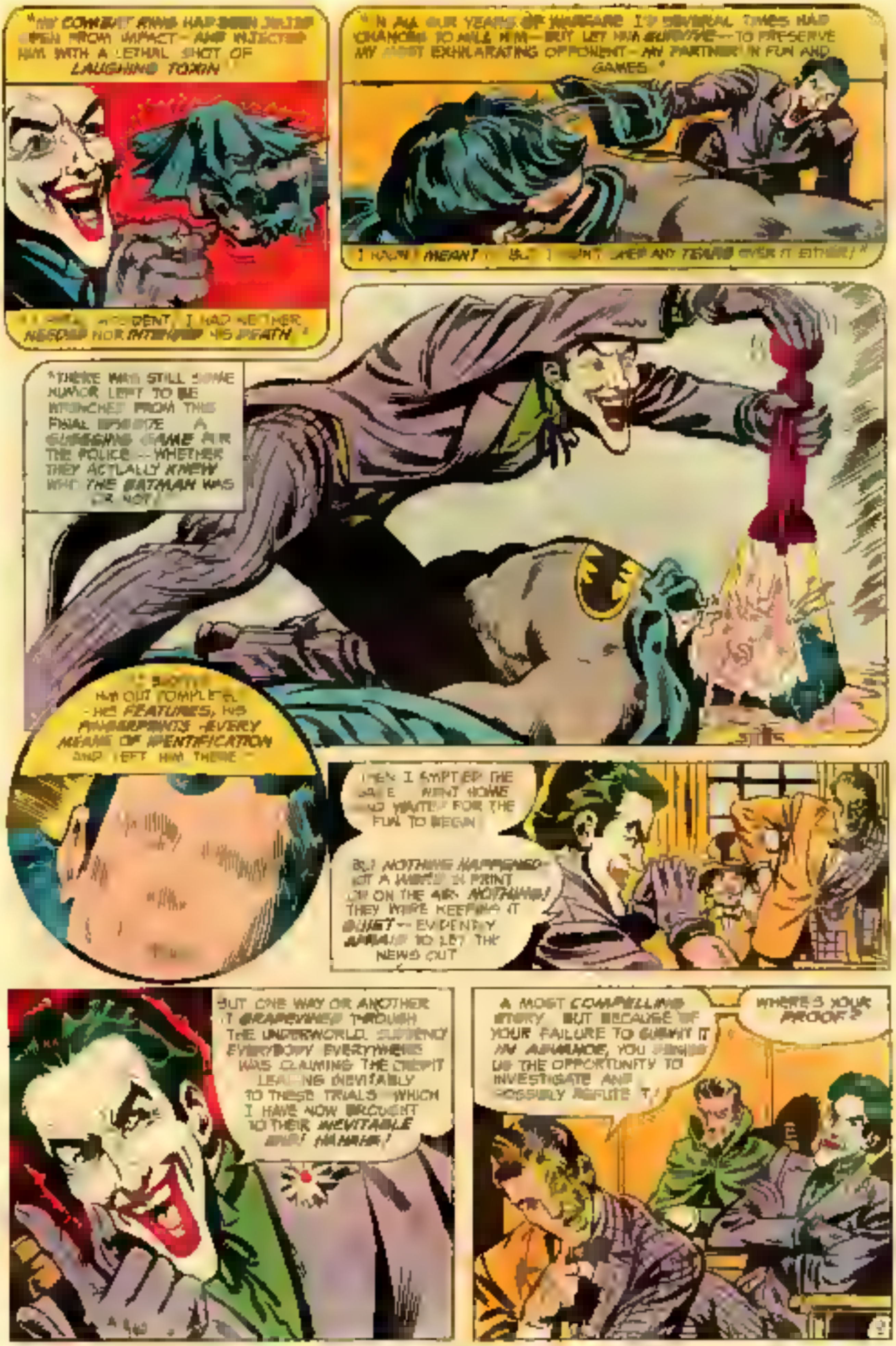

"THERE HE WAS--A NICKEL-AND-DIME SLOB--SNAGGING SOME SAMPLES
--AND MAYBE SCUTTLING MY MISSION IN THE PROCESS BY CLUMSILY SETTING OFF AN ALARM!"
"--MAYBE? THERE WAS NO MAYBE ABOUT IT, FOR ALL OF A SUDDEN...
B-BATMAN!
HE'D BROADCAST AN INVITATION--AND YOUR NEMESIS AND MINE HAD COME TO THE PARTY."
"THE STUPE COULD THINK OF NOTHING BETTER THAN TO PULL A SLASHER...
SLISH
WITH PREDICTABLE RESULTS!"
"RIGHT THEN AND THERE, I HAD MY CHANCE... AND THE MEANS... TO PUT THEM BOTH AWAY. AN AIR-GUN WITH BARBED PELLETS THAT INSTANTLY LOWERED THE BLOOD PRESSURE TO ZILCH AND KONK-OUT!
CLICK
--IF ONLY I HADN'T NEGLECTED TO LOAD IT!"
"SO THERE WASN'T A THING I COULD DO BUT CONTINUE LYING DOGGO AND WATCH FROM A RINGSIDE SEAT...


"THE MORE I WATCHED THE MORE MY INITIAL ANGER AND FRUSTRATION GAVE WAY TO ENJOYMENT!..."
"...AND THEN, TO A PROFOUND, CONCENTRATED STUDY OF THE BATMAN'S MOVES"
"—HIS LIGHTNING REFLEXES"
"—THE INSTINCTIVE COUNTERS—"
"IT WAS A SEMINAR IN SLUGGING—AND I PAID CLOSE ATTENTION!"
THONK
"THE END WAS CLASSICAL! HOW WELL I REMEMBERED THAT LEFT HOOK COMING OFF A JAB!"
"THE SLUMBERLAND SPECIAL"


"BY THAT TIME THE FUZZ SHOWED UP..."
A SOLO JOB, HUH, BATMAN?
SEEMS LIKE-- BUT IT WON'T HURT TO TURN ON THE LIGHTS AND LOOK AROUND!
RIGHT! WHERE'S THE SWITCH--?
"SO WHILE THEY WERE LOOKING FOR THE SWITCH--
"...I QUIETLY REMOVED MYSELF FROM THE PREMISES IN A BIG HURRY--THE WAY I'D COME IN."
Chateau Bonheur
FURS FOR THE DISCRIMINATING
"AND AS I JAMMED TO MY HA-HACIENDA, I FIGURED THE EVENING WELL SPENT... EVEN THOUGH IT HAD ITS NEGATIVE ASPECTS..."
"FOR ONE THING, MISSING THAT CRACK AT THE BATMAN WITH A USELESS WEAPON... WHEN I'D HAD AN ARSENAL OF ALTERNATIVES AT MY DISPOSAL...
"A SAD COMMENTARY ON HOW RUSTY A PERSON CAN GET... LIVING IN A PADDED CELL!"
"MOREOVER, I HADN'T COPPED THE LOOT--WHICH MEANT I'D HAVE TO MAKE ANOTHER TRIP THE NEXT NIGHT."
SHNK
"BUT ON THE POSITIVE SIDE--"
"...I'D LEARNED SOME THINGS ABOUT THE BATMAN'S RHYTHMS AND RESPONSES I HADN'T BEEN AWARE OF--
WHICH WOULD ADD SPICE AND EXCITEMENT TO OUR NEXT MEETING... WHEN MY COMING CAPER BURST INTO BLOOM!"
"IN FACT WHEN I CONTEMPLATED HOW LONG I'D HAVE TO WAIT FOR THAT NEXT MEETING, I WAS DEPRESSED--
BANG
HAHAHAHAHA
"--BUT FORTUNATELY, I DON'T DEPRESS EASILY!"

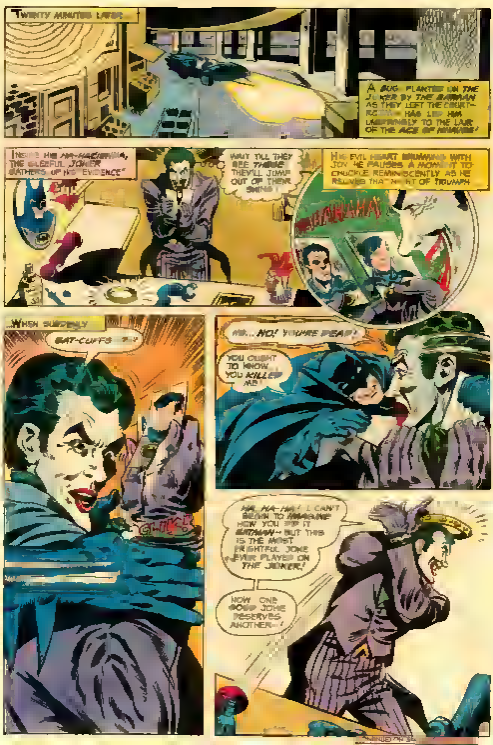

"THE FOLLOWING NIGHT..."
"MY CIRCUIT-BYPASS ON THE SKYLIGHT ALARM WAS STILL IN PLACE -- JUST AS [illegible]--
"OBVIOUSLY, THAT CLUNK'S INEPT BREAK-IN THE NIGHT BEFORE, VIA THE FIRE ESCAPE, HAD CONVINCED THEM THEIR SYSTEM WAS FAULTLESS!"
"IT WAS [illegible] THAT, PERHAPS, I WAS A BIT CARELESS -- MOVING TOO FAST -- BECAUSE --
INCREDIBLE. UTTERLY INCREDIBLE!
"--JUST AS I REACHED THE SPOT WHERE I'D BEEN STANDING THE NIGHT BEFORE THERE HE WAS--"
"--THE BATMAN! BUT THE STRANGEST PART OF IT WAS--HE SEEMED EVEN MORE ASTONISHED TO SEE ME!"
GASP! THE JOKER!
"HE STOOD THERE, MOTIONLESS... ROOTED! THEN HE STARTED TO SAY 'LISTEN, JOKER'--"
"--BUT THAT WAS AS FAR AS HE GOT..."
ARRRGGGHHHH!
I'M LISTENING! AND I LIKE WHAT I HEAR! HA-HA-HA.
"FOR OPENERS, I POPPED HIM WITH A BURNING DOSE OF DISSOLVING FLUID!"
"THEN--AS HE DOUBLED UP--TRYING TO SHIELD HIMSELF..."
"...DOWN HE WENT--LIKE A DEAD WEIGHT!"

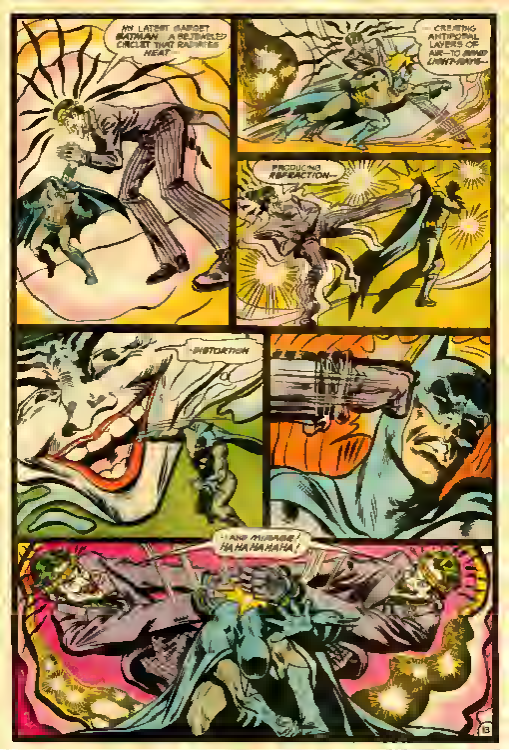

"IT WAS LIKE A DREAM—"
"NO MATTER WHAT HE TRIED— I COULD DO NO WRONG!
"WITH HIS VISION BLURRED, MOST OF HIS BLOWS MISSED—"
AND THE FEW THAT LANDED WERE MEANINGLESS!"
"AND STILL HE KEPT COMING ON ... AND ON ... AND ON."
"—UNTIL I THREW THE FINISHER—"
WHOK
"—AND EVEN THEN, HE GRINNED AT ME — OR SO I THOUGHT—"
"—BUT ONLY FOR A MOMENT. WHEN HE SANK DOWN, CONVULSED WITH LAUGHTER—"
HAHA... HAHAHAHA
"—AND I REALIZED WHAT HAD HAPPENED!"

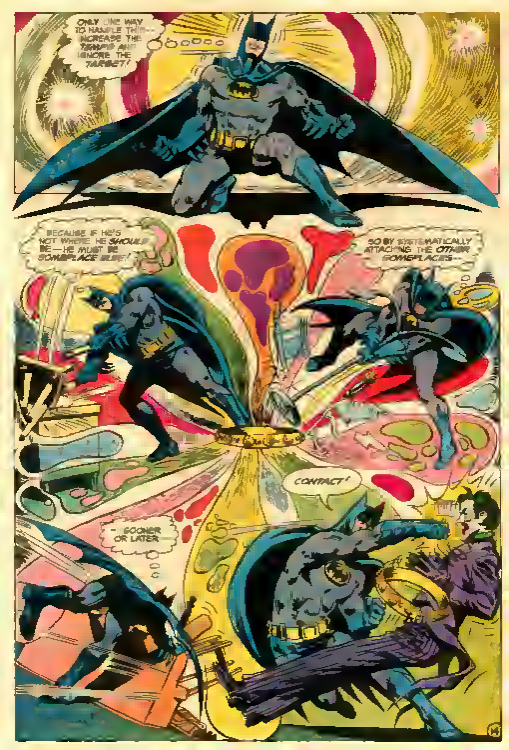

"MY COMBAT RING HAD BEEN JOLTED OPEN FROM IMPACT -- AND INJECTED HIM WITH A LETHAL SHOT OF LAUGHING TOXIN."
"A FREAK ACCIDENT. I HAD NEITHER NEEDED NOR INTENDED HIS DEATH."
"IN ALL OUR YEARS OF WARFARE I'D SEVERAL TIMES HAD CHANCES TO KILL HIM -- BUT LET HIM SURVIVE -- TO PRESERVE MY MOST EXHILARATING OPPONENT -- MY PARTNER IN FUN AND GAMES."
"I HADN'T MEANT IT... BUT I WON'T SHED ANY TEARS OVER IT EITHER!"
"THERE WAS STILL SOME HUMOR LEFT TO BE WRENCHED FROM THIS FINAL EPISODE... A GUESSING GAME FOR THE POLICE -- WHETHER THEY ACTUALLY KNEW WHO THE BATMAN WAS OR NOT!"
"I BLOTTED HIM OUT COMPLETELY -- HIS FEATURES, HIS FINGERPRINTS -- EVERY MEANS OF IDENTIFICATION -- AND LEFT HIM THERE."
THEN I EMPTIED THE SAFE... WENT HOME AND WAITED FOR THE FUN TO BEGIN.
BUT NOTHING HAPPENED -- NOT A WORD IN PRINT OR ON THE AIR. NOTHING! THEY WERE KEEPING IT QUIET -- EVIDENTLY AFRAID TO LET THE NEWS OUT.
BUT ONE WAY OR ANOTHER IT GRAPEVINED THROUGH THE UNDERWORLD. SUDDENLY EVERYBODY EVERYWHERE WAS CLAIMING THE CREDIT, LEADING INEVITABLY TO THESE TRIALS -- WHICH I HAVE NOW BROUGHT TO THEIR INEVITABLE END! HAHAHA!
A MOST COMPELLING STORY. BUT BECAUSE OF YOUR FAILURE TO SUBMIT IT IN ADVANCE, YOU DENIED US THE OPPORTUNITY TO INVESTIGATE AND POSSIBLY REFUTE IT!
WHERE'S YOUR PROOF?

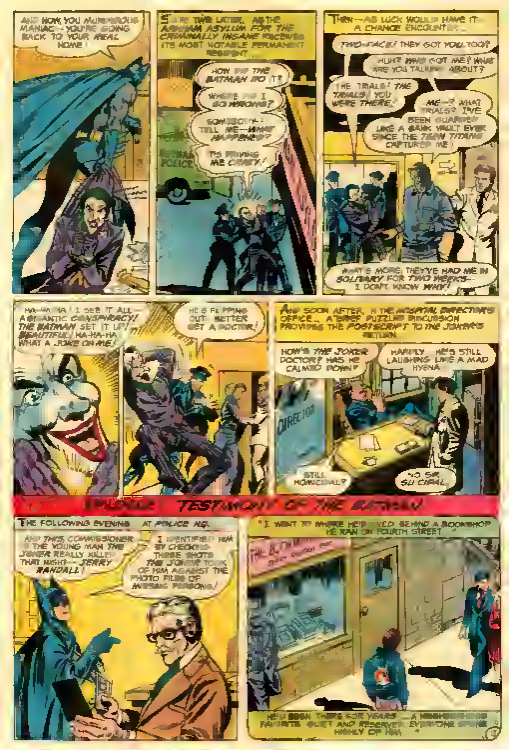

YOU KNOW THE JOKER BETTER THAN THAT, TWO-FACE! YOU KNOW I'D NEVER COME HERE WITHOUT SOMETHING TANGIBLE TO BACK UP MY WORDS!
I DO HAVE PROOF -- AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHY I DIDN'T SUBMIT A WRITTEN CLAIM!
ANYONE WHO READ THAT CLAIM -- AND WHO KNEW ME -- WOULD NEVER DOUBT THAT I HAD EVIDENCE -- EVIDENCE WHICH, IF STOLEN --
-- COULD BE USED BY ANYONE TO CLAIM THE CREDIT FOR THE BATMAN'S DEATH -- WITH A STORY INVENTED TO GO WITH IT!
AND WHAT MIGHT THAT EVIDENCE BE?
PHOTOGRAPHS I TOOK OF THE DEAD BATMAN -- BEFORE I OBLITERATED HIS IDENTITY!
AND YOU HAVE THESE PHOTOGRAPHS WITH YOU?
HA-HA-HA! YOU DON'T REALLY THINK I'D CARRY SOMETHING THAT VALUABLE -- IN A ROOM FULL OF PEOPLE LIKE US -- WITHOUT FIRST GETTING MY STORY ON RECORD IN OPEN COURT?
YOUR HONOR, I ASK THE COURT TO DECLARE A RECESS UNTIL THE JOKER RETURNS WITH HIS PROOF!
GRANTED! THIS COURT STANDS IN RECESS FOR ONE HOUR!
AS THE SESSION BREAKS, EXCITEMENT IS AT FEVER PITCH --
YOU'RE OKAY, BIG JAY!
YOU GOT IT MADE, LAUGHING BOY!
HURRY --
-- BACK!
MOMENTS LATER, AS TWO-FACE SURREPTITIOUSLY LEAVES THE MANSION AND STARTS RUNNING THROUGH THE PARK SURROUNDING FIELDS -- AN ASTOUNDING METAMORPHOSIS UNFOLDS --
-- IT BEGINS WITH [illegible] RIPPING AWAY AT HIS SCARRED AND TWISTED VISAGE --
11


AND ENDS WITH THE MATERIALIZATION OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST DETECTIVE -- CONSUMMATE MASTER OF DISGUISE -- WHO HAS USED HIS MATCHLESS SKILLS IN A SUPERB MARATHON-IMPERSONATION DURING THE COURSE OF THESE TRIALS TO IDENTIFY HIS SUPPOSED KILLER!
FIRST -- WITH THE CATWOMAN
YOU SAY THIS CAGE KEPT YOU AFLOAT AND SAVED YOUR LIFE. BUT IT'S MADE OF BRAZILIAN PEPPERWOOD -- AND IT SINKS LIKE A ROCK!
FOLLOWED BY--
THERE'S NOTHING TO FEAR, RIDDLER -- AND THAT'S WHY YOUR STORY IS A FAKE!
FIRE DOESN'T EXPLODE DYNAMITE -- ONLY BURNS IT UP!
AND -- MOST RECENTLY
LUTHOR! THAT BALD EGG HEAD OF YOURS HAS HATCHED MANY A HAIRY SCHEME. BUT THE ONE YOU'VE RECOUNTED HERE IS A HAREBRAINED DELUSION!
YOU DIDN'T KILL THE BATMAN -- AND SUPERMAN IS THE IRREFUTABLE WITNESS TO PROVE IT!
-- AND NOT FAR BEHIND IS HIS BATMOBILE!

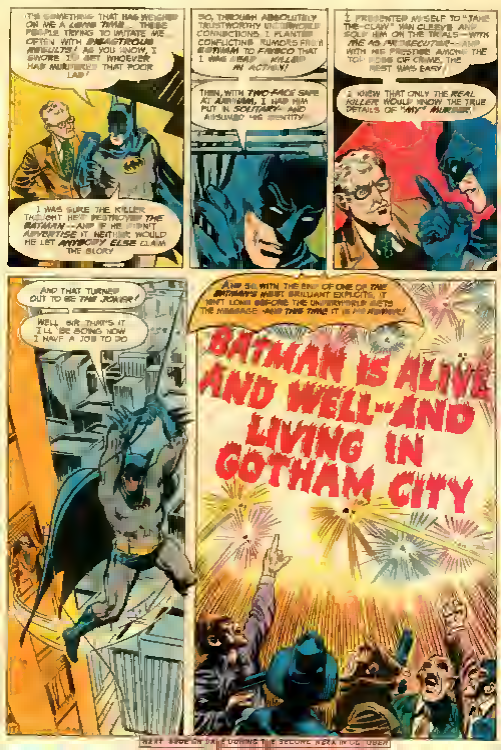

TWENTY MINUTES LATER...
A BUG PLANTED ON THE JOKER BY THE BATMAN AS THEY LEFT THE CHURCH RECORDS HAS LED HIM UNERRINGLY TO THE LAIR OF THE ACE OF HEARTS!
INSIDE HIS HA-HA-HACIENDA, THE GLEEFUL JOKER GATHERS UP HIS EVIDENCE
WAIT TILL THEY SEE THIS!
THEY'LL JUMP OUT OF THEIR SKINS!
HIS EVIL HEART BRIMMING WITH JOY, HE PAUSES A MOMENT TO CHUCKLE REMINISCENTLY AS HE RELIVES THE HEIGHT OF TRIUMPH
BRIMMING
WHEN SUDDENLY
BAT-CUFFS
SNAP
HA...NO! YOU'RE DEAD!
YOU OUGHT TO KNOW YOU KILLED US!
HA, HA-HA! I CAN'T BEGIN TO IMAGINE HOW YOU FOOLED BATMAN - BUT THIS IS THE MOST FRIGHTFUL JOKE EVER PLAYED ON THE JOKER!
NOW, ONE MORE JOKE DESERVES ANOTHER!


MY LATEST GADGET BATMAN A BEJEWELED CIRCLET THAT RADIATES HEAT--
-- CREATING ANTIPODAL LAYERS OF AIR--TO BEND LIGHT-RAYS--
PRODUCING REFRACTION--
--DISTORTION
--AND MIRAGE! HA HA HA HA HA!


ONLY ONE WAY TO HANDLE THIS-- INCREASE THE TEMPO AND IGNORE THE TARGET!
BECAUSE IF HE'S NOT WHERE HE SHOULD BE—HE MUST BE SOMEPLACE ELSE!
SO BY SYSTEMATICALLY ATTACKING THE OTHER SOMEPLACES--
--SOONER OR LATER--
CONTACT!


AND NOW, YOU MURDEROUS MANIAC — YOU'RE GOING BACK TO YOUR REAL HOME!
SOME TIME LATER, AS THE ARKHAM ASYLUM FOR THE CRIMINALLY INSANE RECEIVES ITS MOST NOTABLE PERMANENT RESIDENT...
HOW DID THE BATMAN DO IT?
WHERE DID I GO WRONG?
SOMEBODY — TELL ME — WHAT HAPPENED?
IT'S DRIVING ME CRAZY!
POLICE
THEN — AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT — A CHANCE ENCOUNTER...
TWO-FACE! THEY GOT YOU TOO?
HUH? WHO GOT ME? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
THE TRIALS! THE TRIALS! YOU WERE THERE!
ME —? WHAT TRIALS? I'VE BEEN GUARDED LIKE A BANK VAULT EVER SINCE THE TEEN TITANS CAPTURED ME!
WHAT'S MORE, THEY'VE HAD ME IN SOLITARY FOR TWO WEEKS — I DON'T KNOW WHY!
HA-HA-HA! I SEE IT ALL — A GIGANTIC CONSPIRACY! THE BATMAN SET IT UP! BEAUTIFUL! HA-HA-HA WHAT A JOKE ON ME!
HE'S FLIPPING OUT! BETTER GET A DOCTOR!
AND SOON AFTER, IN THE HOSPITAL DIRECTOR'S OFFICE... A BRIEF PUZZLED DISCUSSION PROVIDES THE POSTSCRIPT TO THE JOKER'S RETURN
HOW'S THE JOKER, DOCTOR? HAS HE CALMED DOWN?
HARDLY — HE'S STILL LAUGHING LIKE A MAD HYENA!
DIRECTOR
STILL HOMICIDAL?
NO SIR, SUICIDAL.
EPISODE 2: TESTIMONY OF THE BATMAN!
THE FOLLOWING EVENING AT POLICE HQ.
AND THIS, COMMISSIONER, IS THE YOUNG MAN THE JOKER REALLY KILLED THAT NIGHT — JERRY RANDALL!
I IDENTIFIED HIM BY CHECKING THESE SHOTS THE JOKER TOOK OF HIM AGAINST THE PHOTO FILES OF MISSING PERSONS!
"I WENT TO WHERE HE'D LIVED BEHIND A BOOKSHOP HE RAN ON FOURTH STREET.
THE BOOK NOOK JERRY RANDALL PROP.
HE'D BEEN THERE FOR YEARS — A NEIGHBORHOOD FAVORITE. QUIET AND RESERVED. EVERYONE SPOKE HIGHLY OF HIM."


"HE HAD A VERY PRIVATE, VERY SECRET HOBBY... WHICH HE DESCRIBED AT LENGTH IN A DIARY I FOUND..."
"HE WAS A GREAT ADMIRER OF MINE... COLLECTED PICTURES OF ME, STORIES, NEWS ITEMS! NOTHING WAS TOO TRIVIAL FOR HIM..."
"AND HE APPARENTLY WORRIED A LOT ABOUT THE BATMAN BEING IN CONSTANT JEOPARDY."
"HE FEARED SOMEBODY WOULD DO ME IN EVENTUALLY AND WHEN THAT HAPPENED, HE PLANNED TO TAKE MY PLACE AND CARRY ON MY WORK!"
SO HE TRIED TO MODEL HIMSELF AFTER ME IN EVERY WAY! WHENEVER HE'D READ SOMETHING I'D BEEN INVOLVED IN, HE'D ATTEMPT TO DUPLICATE MY PART IN IT!
DUPLICATE IT? HOW--?
HE'D GO TO WHEREVER THE EPISODE HAD OCCURRED, CHANGE INTO A COPY OF MY COSTUME, SOMEHOW MANAGING TO GET INTO THE PLACE... EVADING GUARDS AND DETECTION SYSTEMS...
AND THEN ACT OUT WHATEVER HE'D READ OR THEORIZED HAD HAPPENED!
HE MUST'VE BEEN PRETTY GOOD AT IT--
--BECAUSE HE NEVER GOT INTO ANY TROUBLE--UNTIL THAT NIGHT AT CHATEAU BONHEUR!
HIS LAST DIARY ENTRY WAS ABOUT THAT LOFT CRACKER I'D CAUGHT THERE THE NIGHT BEFORE. HE'D READ THE NEWS ACCOUNTS AND WAS GOING TO ACT THEM OUT!
"SO THERE HE WAS--DOING HIS ROUTINE--WHEN THE JOKER RAN ACROSS HIM... AND KILLED HIM!"
YOU REMEMBER, COMMISSIONER, THAT WHEN HE WAS FIRST FOUND, YOU THOUGHT IT MIGHT REALLY BE ME... UNTIL I RESPONDED TO YOUR HOT-LINE CALL!"
"WE DON'T HAVE CLUE-ONE ABOUT HIM OR WHAT HE'D BEEN DOING THERE... BUT FROM HIS COSTUME, I GUESSED WHAT HAD PROBABLY HAPPENED..."
"IT WASN'T THE FIRST TIME I'D SEEN THAT SORT OF THING... THOUGH I PRAY IT WILL BE THE LAST!"



NEXT ISSUE ON SALE DURING THE SECOND WEEK IN OCTOBER

BAT-SIGNALS

c/o DC COMICS INC., 75 ROCKEFELLER PLAZA
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10019

Dear folks,

Well, the curtain went up last night on the first performance of "Skull Dugger's Killjoy Capers" (**BATMAN #296**) and as usual, your faithful reviewer for the **Gotham Herald** was there front-row center. I found this play an excellent example of a Julie Schwartz production.

Bruce Wayne has once again returned to the stage as one of our fair city's most exciting citizens. He brings with him one of the most powerful interpretations of **The Batman** that I have ever seen. He exhibits a wide range of emotions from joy to fear and makes you believe it. When he's on stage, Wayne is **The Batman**.

The villain of the piece, **Skull Dugger**, is well played by Cosmo Dugger. He provides the perfect counterpoint to Wayne's **Batman**. Where **Batman** soothes with repressed emotion, **Skull Dugger** openly goes about his business. Where **Batman** takes a pure, natural joy in defeating his enemies, **Skull Dugger's** joy is unnaturally produced. **Batman** is a professional. He knows the ins and outs of crime as well as he knows the back of his gloved hand. **Skull Dugger** is a talented amateur who actually makes less mistakes than the pro.

The rest of the cast is well-rounded, with even Commissioner Gordon appearing as himself.

David V. Reed, the playwright, has written about **The Batman** before, but this time he shows a side of the character we have rarely seen. We find that **Batman** actually takes a sadistic pleasure in taking his enemies in. This brings the character down to the level of the people where he does so much of his fighting. If I were **Batman**, I'd talk to Reed about his image.

Mike Grell did a lavish job on directing the play as well as in choreographing the fight scenes. He is only one in a long line of directors to have a **Batman** on stage, but continues to prove himself one of the best.

Even the stage crew proved to be extremely competent... from stage manager Vince Colletta to lights manager Jerry Serpe.

Overall, a fine show that deserves an absurdly long run!

D.B. WEBB
Route 1, Box 66A
Buena Vista, TN 38318

(While the *Gotham Herald* praised *BATMAN #296*, the *Mackinaw Monitor* panned it, as shown by the review below!—BR)

Dear Editor:

To tell the truth, I didn't care much for the two-part **Skull Dugger** caper. The plot left much to be desired, the coincidences were too contrived to be believed, and **Batman** spent most of the second part doing little more than reminding us how much pain he was in. **Skull** himself was nothing more than a substandard villain, though he could have been played as a sympathetic character. And **Batman's** brutality was a bit overdone. Shall I go on? No, I think you get the [illegible].

The most offensive of the aforementioned coincidences is the fact that **Skull Dugger's** device left a skull sign on its victims. A burn the size of a quarter would have been more suitable — and acceptable. But a mark that coincides with the nickname of the killer seems too far out of the realm of possibility. Similarly, there's the skull-burn on Dugger's chest. It's a great touch of irony, but why should a fatal electrical charge leave such a mark?

As for **Dugger** himself, he could have been altered slightly into a very touching and emotional persona. As it was, Cosmo was a ruthless killer, concerned with his own well-being and not caring what the repercussions would be. If he had been horrified with the results, we might have had a completely different story. After the first murder, he might have considered giving it up. But after experiencing the joy he stole, he would reconsider—in effect becoming a joy junkie whether he wanted to go on or not. That's the kind of story I would have liked to see ... but you can't win 'em all.

MIKE WHITE
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(Two critics down, one to go! "Gruesome, shocking, incredible!" says the *Brentwood Skull Bulletin* in the wrap-up which follows!—BR)

Dear Editor:

The cover of **BATMAN #296** looked like **The Twilight Zone** after a meal of hot peppers and [illegible]—gruesome, shocking, incredible!

The conclusion to the saga of Cosmo (**Skull**) Dugger was an incredible tale, based on the logical but previously unexplored conclusion that **The Batman** never finds his life a drudge—he enjoys every minute of his chosen profession. We could always assume this, but here it is based for the first time on solid data.

David V. Reed can't possibly grow into the lore of **Batman** any further than he already has. This one wasn't just a super-hero story—it was a true gothic horror suitable for any medium. **BATMAN** is now monthly rapture for any serious student of his legend.

CHARLES G. BROWN
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(Next issue, the understudies step in for a special *BATMAN* production as Gerry Conway and newcomer Michael Golden present "The Case of the Houdini Whodunit," featuring the return of the *Gotham Mystery Analysts!* Be here for the second Skull in October!—Bob Rozakis)